

THIRTY MILLION BILL.

SPEECH

OF

WILLIAM H. SEWARD.

In the Senate of the United States, January 24, 1859.

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SPEECH OF MR. SEWARD.

ill reported by Mr. SLIDELL, appropri-
ty millions of dollars to the President,
ed for the purpose of acquiring Cuba,
der consideration—

SEWARD said :

resident, I am authorized by the hon-
enator from Vermont, [Mr. FOOT,] who,
elf, is a member of the Committee on
Relations, to say that he, with myself,
from the report which has been sub-
y a majority of the Committee on For-
tions, and also from the bill which has
orted by that committee; and to sub-
way of expressing our views as a minor-
l, which we offer as a substitute for the
red by the committee. I ask to have
printed in the same manner with the
f the committee. After the bill shall
en read, I shall ask the indulgence of
ate to indicate something of my views
e subject, although not very much at
I ask for the reading of the bill.

Secretary read the substitute, as follows :

concerning the relations between the United States
and Spain.

And be it enacted, &c., that the President of the
States, at the beginning of the next an-
session of Congress, communicate to the
, if in his opinion not incompatible with
blic interests, the condition of the rela-
which shall then be subsisting between
nited States and Spain, and of any ne-
ons that may then be pending for the
i of Cuba to the United States, together
uch statements of the condition of the
ry, and also of the effective condition
army and navy of the United States,
y enable Congress to judge whether, at
me, it will be necessary to adopt any
rdinary measures to maintain the rights
omote the interests of the United States,

connected with or growing out of their rela-
tions to Spain.

And be it further enacted, That the Presi-
dent, if in his discretion he shall deem it neces-
sary, in view of the condition of negotiations
with her Catholic Majesty which shall be pend-
ing, during the next recess of Congress, may
convene either the Senate or Congress in ex-
traordinary session, by proclamation."

Mr. SEWARD. Mr. President, the bills
which engage the attention of Congress general-
ly originate either in the Senate or in the House
of Representatives. But this measure is ushered
into our presence by a message from the Execu-
tive palace. It is therefore, in its origin, an Ex-
ecutive measure. Its nature corresponds to its
parentage. It proposes to relax constitutional
and legislative restraints upon the Executive
power, and to transfer control over the Treasury,
together with the power of negotiation in for-
eign affairs, from Congress and from the Senate
to the President of the United States. It is not
an isolated Executive measure of this kind, but
it is one of a series of such measures which the
President of the United States has introduced
at the present session in the same way. One
of this series proposes that Congress shall au-
thorize the President to move the army and the
navy of the United States into adjacent States
of the Republic of Mexico, and establish a pro-
tectorate there. Another asks our consent to
invest the President of the United States with
the power to make war, in his own discretion
and at his own pleasure, against all or nearly
all the Spanish American States on this conti-
nent.

A measure thus disparaging to the intelligence,
the virtue, and the independence of the National
Legislature, a measure apparently so dangerous
to the civil and religious liberties of the Ameri-
can people, it must be expected, will receive at
the hands of Congress a careful scrutiny. It is

not my purpose, at this time, to bestow that scrutiny, in its full extent, upon the bill which has been reported in accordance with the recommendation of the President of the United States; but I do intend to indicate some of the considerations which have brought me to the conviction that this bill under no circumstances ought to receive the favor of Congress.

The bill has a financial aspect. It has also a broad political character. In regard to the financial aspect, I call the attention of the Senate to the fact that the bill proposes to appropriate now, at this time, out of the Treasury of the United States, \$30,000,000, to be placed under the control of the President of the United States, to be paid by him to Spain, whenever she shall have consented to accept any treaty which he may make with her, for the cession of Cuba to the United States, without waiting for a ratification of that treaty by the Senate of the United States. This appropriation of \$30,000,000 necessarily involves now a pledge, a guarantee, virtually a grant or appropriation of so many more millions of dollars as the President of the United States, without any recourse to the Senate or to Congress, and consulting only his own mere ambition, caprice, or pleasure, shall agree to give for that island; and this last amount is altogether unlimited.

The bill contains no limitation, and the President recommends no limitation. It is a bill, then, for just so many millions as the President shall choose to write in the treaty. What will be the number of those millions? The majority of the committee say that it will probably be \$125,000,000. This calculation is based upon the fact that Spain refused \$100,000,000 ten years ago, and that Cuba has increased in value \$25,000,000, according to the estimate of the majority of the committee. This estimate is inconclusive, and therefore unsatisfactory. The amount which Spain will ask, if we suppose her to accede to this treaty, will be all that she can get, and the amount which the President will give, if it be his purpose to acquire the Island of Cuba at all events and under all hazards, will be the least that Spain will consent to take. It may then just as well and as accurately be estimated that the sum to be written in the treaty will be \$200,000,000 or \$250,000,000 or \$500,000,000, as that it shall be only \$125,000,000.

I will assume that it authorizes the President to contract a debt to Spain, without again consulting Congress or the Senate of the United States, for the sum of \$250,000,000. This proposition comes at a time when our revenues are reduced to \$50,000,000, and there is a confessed deficiency for the year of \$30,000,000. It is immaterial whether we borrow this \$30,000,000 to pay to Spain, as the bill proposes, or whether we pay it out of the receipts of the revenues flowing into the Treasury, and borrow the money to supply the place of what we thus abstract. It proposes nothing less than to authorize the

President of the United States to create and absolutely a debt of \$30,000,000 directly a further debt of \$220,000,000 to a deficit, which is virtually an additional debt against the Treasury of \$30,000,000, making \$60,000,000 of new debt certifying \$220,000,000 contingent. This, added to the already funded debt of \$60,000,000, makes the national debt to \$340,000,000. To be done under extraordinary circumstances. We have at this moment no financial system of revenue. We have indeed a law which brought last year into the Treasury over \$40,000,000, and this year is expected to bring in \$50,000,000; but a revenue which leaves an annual deficit cannot constitute a fiscal system. Congress, being in session now near two months, has utterly failed to devise any kind of revenue whatever. Nor has the Executive Administration submitted to Congress any system of emergency. This statement is strictly true. You consider that the President recommends one system in his annual message, and the Secretary of the Treasury, his own responsible minister of finance, submits to us another widely different one.

This great increase of the public debt is asked to make at the very hour when, in compliance with the Executive recommendation, we are proposing to authorize him to build the Pacific railroad, at a cost of not less than \$125,000,000 more; and simultaneously, in the same message, we are also authorizing the President to move the army to Mexico, which can cost nothing less than \$100,000,000 more; and at the same time, in pursuance of recommendations of the Executive, by weight and authority, we are asked to authorize him to employ the army and the navy just so many Spanish-American States as he shall choose, which can cost nothing less than \$100,000,000 more; and, without any financial system at all, we are creating a great debt created by this Congress in the United States, on the recommendation of the President to strengthen the Executive, while weakening the Executive and the constitutional foundation of the Government and the House of Representatives—a debt of \$500,000,000.

The honorable Senator from Rhode Island [Mr. SIMMONS] the other day spoke in these terms, and yet most justly, of the credit of the United States, and showed that, with the debt that we now have, a nominal debt, if we go into the market, and with a five per cent stock borrow money at a premium, or if we borrow money at par on a four per cent note anywhere in the markets of the world, because we are novices, inexperienced, and unknown in the money market, except in paying such small debts as we have made, sir, when we shall have shown that we increase our debt in forty days, for that

which remains of this session, from \$0,000 to \$500,000,000, I beg leave to express the opinion that the rate of interest will tend to rise in proportion to the liberality which we propose to borrow. In that case, I will find your revenue derived from all sources scarcely more than enough to pay the interest of the debt which you shall thus have incurred, leaving no funds whatever for carrying on ordinary operations of the Government. It, however, it might be said, is a fanciful picture, because the bill appropriates only \$30,000,000, and not the whole \$250,000,000, I have supposed. Nevertheless, sir, it requires the whole amount which the President shall write in the treaty. We give him a draft on the Treasury, and authorize him to draw the amount for himself. I have supposed he will fill it up with \$250,000,000. But I would hold that we can retreat from this contract at any time if we find it too expensive, and may do so on the measure without paying the additional sum which the President may write in the treaty. Slowly and carefully, Mr. President, we must consider. Certainly, we cannot retreat without forfeiting the \$30,000,000 which has already been paid. That condition will operate as a constraint upon Congress to appropriate the remaining millions which the President may stipulate, and it will equally operate as a constraint upon the Senate to ratify the treaty, if the same sum may be stipulated by its provisions.

Now, sir, no one can suppose that the President would pay the \$30,000,000 in advance to the United States without securing possession of the Island of Cuba. When he has once obtained the Island of Cuba, and paid \$30,000,000 as an advance on the consideration money of the purchase, the treaty will be a contract executed, and the whole world would laugh with scorn at the pretence that we could rescind the contract and repudiate the remaining debt, on the ground that we had then looked into our consciences, and had found that we had violated the law by which we had authorized the President to make the improvident bargain. This is a plan of financial management to which I am a stranger. It is the province of Congress of the United States to take care of the public Treasury, and to see that every dollar that is received remains there until, by appropriation bills limited to single objects, and valid for only two years, the money is expended by agents, under their own directed authority, for objects appointed, fixed, and certain. The effect of this measure is to transfer the control over a large portion of the national treasure and resources—practically all that is valuable in the Treasury—to the President of the United States, without giving any effective security for his wise and judicious administration of it.

I have said that the bill has also a political character. It proposes to bring into the United

States a foreign country, seven hundred miles long, and seventy miles wide, containing one million five hundred thousand human beings, subjects of government, occupying practically every foot upon the side-walks in its cities, and every acre of mountain and plain and valley in the rural districts of that island—a population different entirely from the citizens of the United States; different in language, different in race, different in habits, different in manners, different in customs, and radically different in religion; a population that will, practically, forever hold the power to exclude all American immigration, at least to exclude it as effectually as the old States of Europe exclude our migration there, and as effectually as our old-established States practically exclude immigration from outside of their borders. This population, then, is to be the ruling population of that island. What rights will citizens of the United States enjoy there? The one million five hundred thousand souls are divided: one half whites, two hundred and fifty thousand free blacks, and four hundred thousand slaves. What institutions of justice, of freedom, of religion, and public worship, will obtain or remain there? I need to know. If I were willing to leave these great questions to the President of the United States, I have no right to do so. I have a voice, one of sixty-four voices, to determine whether such a country shall be brought into the United States, and on what terms and conditions. Joined with my colleague, we have one of thirty-two voices on these mighty, questionable! The power to speak involves a constitutional responsibility to express the voice of the State of New York upon such a measure, and on all its important details, before it shall be adopted.

I have already shown that the consent of the Senate to the passage of this bill will operate as a constraint upon the Senate to ratify whatever treaty the President shall make hereafter. If this be true, (and no one, I think, can controvert it,) then I am asked to resign a constitutional senatorial power to the President of the United States, and to shift from my own shoulders to his a constitutional responsibility.

To do this, is a derogation of the independence of the constitutional power of the Senate of the United States, and a practical subversion of the constitutional check which requires that every treaty shall receive the votes of two-thirds of this body, or be absolutely void. It practically delegates to a bare majority of the Senate, and to a majority of the House of Representatives, the treaty-making power of this great empire.

Sir, if there ever was an occasion on which I should adhere tenaciously to this right, and insist upon retaining this power, it would be in such a case as this. I want to see the treaty which shall bring the Island of Cuba into the United States. I want to know the *status* of that country which that country is to occupy. Is it to be a ter-

ritory of subjects, of political slaves? a province governed by armies and navies, as Spain now governs it? I may ask the President of the United States, when he has executed the treaty. Is it to be a State? I may ask the President of the United States, when he has executed the treaty. Who are to be the electors of the State? What is to be the *status* of the white population? Are they to enjoy universal suffrage? What is to be the *status* of the free negro population? What is to be the *status* of the slave population? We who have disputed so earnestly, often so vehemently, year after year, year in and year out, over the question whether the institution of Slavery shall be introduced into the Territory of Kansas, are expected by the President, in his simplicity, to allow him to determine, for the North and for the South, for the free States and for the slave States, at his own absolute pleasure, the terms and conditions upon which Cuba shall be annexed to the United States, and incorporated into the Union. I say nothing of the present incumbent of the Executive office. I say that men never chose, nor did God ever send on earth, a magistrate to whom I would confide this great question, having a constitutional right to decide it myself.

I need not say, sir, that all our treaties of annexation contain stipulations guarantying rights to the countries annexed, to be incorporated into the Union, and determining the future political rights, power, and authority, of the inhabitants of those countries. This bill, then, is in derogation of the power of the Senate to determine by treaty for itself what the safety, honor, and welfare of the country demand in regard to the political organization and government of the Island of Cuba, if it shall be acquired.

Sir, I have always received as a political maxim the declarations made by our predecessors, in regard to the acquisition of Cuba. Every rock and every grain of sand in that island were drifted and washed out from American soil by the floods of the Mississippi, and the other estuaries of the Gulf of Mexico. The island has seemed to me, just as our predecessors have said, to gravitate back again to the parent continent from which it sprang. I have supposed that political necessities would determine that ultimate conclusion; and I know that to political necessities all actions of Governments must bend, and all sentiments of nations must accommodate themselves. I have, nevertheless, been taught, with the same maxim, this other rule, that the acquisition of Cuba is a question of time, of necessity, and of opportunity. It was just as clear sixty years ago, when we acquired Louisiana, as it is now, that Cuba, in the language of John Quincy Adams, gravitates to the United States, as the apple yet hanging on its native trunk gravitates to the earth which sustains it. Yet it certainly is true that Cuba was not then acquired, nor attempted by extraordinary means to be acquired; and

the reason was, that the time, necessity opportunity, had not then presented themselves. In fact, the time is determined by the coincidence of necessity and opportunity; and coincidence is the result of a decline of European power on this continent, and of a complement of the growth of American power on the same continent. Our forefathers said, and our predecessors have said, that when the juncture shall arise when there shall be just that necessary decline of the political European power on the continent, and just that development of American power here, which makes Spain unable to keep, and ourselves able freely to take the island, then it would be hopeless and to refuse to receive Cuba, even if it were desirable. They have said more, and I subscribe to it—that we may safely hold our patience so long as Spain can keep it, and no stronger European Power can, or dare, take it from her. What I have to say now is, the time and opportunity do not now serve, in my judgment, any more than they have served the last sixty years. We may be nearer, indeed, I doubt not we are—to the acquisition of Cuba; but we have not arrived at the point at which the acquisition must necessarily be made, or can be made, consistently with conditions of peace, prudence, justice, and national honor.

Ten years ago, the President of the United States declared that Cuba was to be acquired only by treaty, by purchase, and not by conquest. The present President of the United States affirms that proposition now; so that the question to be considered is, whether it can be *purchased now*. Well, ten years ago, the President of the United States offered \$100,000,000 for it; and the answer to the proposition conceived in terms so decided, so unequivocal, so utterly forbidding all hope, that it was afterwards renewed; and silence has been observed about it ever since, in order to preserve the good understanding and the good nature of the parties. The message of the President here on Friday last, shows us that, to this hour, the proposition has not been mentioned to Spain for a period of ten years. The same message assures us, even, that it will now be mentioned to Spain, unless some peculiar and extraordinary measures are adopted to require him to bring it again to her attention.

Spain holds the island now more tenaciously—with a stronger and safer grasp than with which she has held it at any time within the last fifty years. It is now a period of repose in Europe and in the Western world. Spain, having gone through the crisis of rendering up her external empire in its late proportions, has entered upon a new era of material progress and improvement. Her culture, her manufactures, her army, and navy, are in a flourishing, prosperous, and improving condition. Heretofore, Spain has been the Island of Cuba in the midst of conflict

the two great Powers of Western Europe, England and France, liable to lose it to one or the other belligerent at any moment. To-day, England and France are not only allies, but are united in the policy of maintaining Spain in the enjoyment of the Islands of Cuba and Porto Rico, the last remnants of her once worldwide empire. Spain exhibits, more decay than ever within the last twenty years, a loss of popular acquiescence and loyalty to her existing institutions. She seems to have passed the period when the country was convulsed, and distracted by the contests of democratic and of monarchical factions. At present, she is apparently in a condition of repose and contentment. If there has been no doubt about this subject, all doubt is now removed by the answer which we have already received from the authorities of Spain to this proposition of the President of the United States in the very form in which it is proposed that we shall adopt it. Our mail of this morning brings us the answer of the Spanish Government and Legislature to our advances, even as we have taken the first step. In the Spanish Chamber of Deputies, M. Ulloa asked the Government—

"It intends to reply to the message of Mr. Buchanan, inasmuch as in that message is a paragraph on the subject of annexing Cuba to the United States, which contains a new and very grave insult to the Spanish nation. The Minister of Foreign Affairs replied that the Government was disposed to demand due satisfaction for such an insult."

In its relations with the United States, as in those with all other countries, it has always endeavored to be circumspect, moderate, reserved, but always dignified and firm, as the ornament of a great people ought to be.

The period of discouragement caused by discord and disunion has ceased in Spain. Our country is now positively in an era of development and veritable restoration. If the power of Spain be not great enough to menace, it is strong enough to defend the integrity of the territory of the monarchy, and to preserve the integrity of the Spanish name without stain.

In whatever circumstances the Spanish nation may find itself, it will, in the future as in the past, never be insensible to its honor; never abandon the smallest portion of its territory, and a proposition having that tendency will always be considered by the Government as an insult to the Spanish people. [Approval.]

The sentiment of nationality, which was supposed to be weakened, and which, unhappily, was slightly weakened by our intestine dissensions—this sentiment, the source of high energies and of generous and heroic aspirations, regains now new vigor, and is increasing in the same way that, whilst we will never be aggressive, and never aspire to dominate, we will not allow any encroachment to be made on

the inheritance left us by our fathers. [Approval.]

M. Olazaga, in his own name and in that of several other eminent members representing the different political parties, then proposed this resolution:

"The Congress declares that it has received with satisfaction the declaration of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and that it is disposed to give to the Government its constant support, in order to maintain the integrity of the Spanish dominions."

"The resolution was unanimously adopted, and ordered to be inscribed in the archives."

Now, sir, after having shown that there is not the least earthly prospect of acquiring the Island of Cuba by or in consequence of the passage of this bill, what follows? It follows that the question whether Cuba is desirable, and ought to be attained, is not at all in debate. It is an idle, a visionary, and mischievous abstraction. There is no such question here; but the question which is presented is, whether the Congress of the United States shall authorize the President of the United States to offer an indignity to Spain. That is all.

Mr. SLIDELL. Will the Senator from New York permit me to interrupt him?

Mr. SEWARD. Certainly.

Mr. SLIDELL. The danger that he deprecates has already arrived. The cause of quarrel exists already, according to the extract he read from the speech of General O'Donnell; the insult has been given by the President, and immediate reparation is demanded. Therefore, we cannot very well aggravate that insult. It has passed from our power.

Mr. SEWARD. I have an answer for the honorable Senator. I propose to leave the President the constitutional power which he enjoys, of instituting treaties with Spain for the purchase of the Island of Cuba, in the Caribbean sea, and with all other Powers for all other islands in all the oceans throughout the globe. I propose to leave him the right and power of sending to Congress messages announcing beforehand the treaties he proposes to make, and leave him to answer, on his own responsibility, to the people and to the world, for the wisdom and the temper, the moderation and the dignity, with which he executes these great trusts. I propose, on the other hand, to reserve my own authority, my own constitutional power, and to maintain the dignity of my own official functions, and not at all to become a party to an insult which the President of the United States may be supposed to have already offered to Spain. I cannot consent to go to his aid, though it may be necessary to draw him out of the dilemma in which he finds himself involved by a rashness which I did not advise.

Sir, I will not stop to inquire, as an abstract question, about the wisdom of a great nation offering insults and indignities to other nations. I will not stop now to inquire about the virtue,

the morality, and the honor, to say nothing of the dignity, of such a course. But I will say this, that it is not wise to offer an indignity to a foreign Power if you are to gain nothing by it. So much may at least be conceded to me. And, now, what is to be obtained by insulting Spain? Nothing, but only this: we must expect that she will be provoked to war to resent the indignity; and when the war has come to resent the indignity, then the prize of Cuba may be attained as indemnity for the expenses of the war. Sir, if we desire to acquire Cuba by negotiation, let us negotiate. The President disclaims and disdains to seek it by war directly. Are we to understand him, and a majority of the committee here, that they ask us to bring Spain indirectly into a war, in order that we may conquer Cuba? That would be to impute to the President and to the committee bad faith, which I must utterly disclaim.

These considerations satisfy me that it is not expected, that it is not intended, that Cuba shall be acquired in consequence of this proceeding; but that it is supposed that some other advantage, some domestic and local benefit, will be secured to the President of the United States by provoking a debate on this subject in Congress. Sir, I do not so much undervalue the intelligence of the American people as to apprehend any such result. The proposition seems to be an empty one, an idle one, a ludicrous one; and if it were not for violating the respect due to the President of the United States

and the majority of the committee who say it, I should say a ridiculous one. There is a play which we have sometimes seen at the theatre, in which the heroine is an honest wife who has a propensity for buying ever at auction, and she is always able to assign at least one good reason for it, namely, though the article bought is not wanted at the time, yet it is cheap, and it will be so hard to have it if it shall ever be wanted. So, once she bought a huge door-plate sold at an auction of a neighbor's furniture, on which was inscribed in large letters the name of "Thompson," spelled with a "p," although her own name, as her husband's, was Toodle. When the indignant Mr. Toodle called her to account for the expense, "why," she said, "how do you know, my dear, that we shall not one day have a child, and that that child may not be a daughter, and that that daughter may not be married to somebody, and just as likely as not that somebody will be a man named 'Thompson,' whose name may be spelled with a 'p,' [laughter] so it will then just fit exactly. I could not buy it, because it was so cheap, and so handy, you know, to have it in the house." That, sir, is exactly the value of this great sentimental demonstration, made, I think, to the detriment of the sinking and wasting fortunes of an administration that has disappointed its own immoderate desires not more than the less sanguine expectations of the American people.